

**VERBAL PRESENTATION TO THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

5 Mar 03

SUBJECT: QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE MILITARY

**VERBAL TESTIMONY OF: CMSAF GERALD R. MURRAY
CHIEF MASTER SGT OF THE AIR FORCE**

GOOD AFTERNOON MISTER CHAIRMAN AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS. AS THE "NEW GUY ON THE BLOCK," IT IS CERTAINLY A GREAT HONOR TO BE HERE TODAY TO DISCUSS ISSUES AFFECTING OUR GREAT AIRMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES.

I CAN THINK OF NO JOB MORE IMPORTANT TODAY THAN THE ONE OUR AIRMEN, SOLDIERS, SAILORS, MARINES AND COASTGUARDSMEN ARE DOING IN SERVICE TO OUR NATION. AS I VISIT THEM AROUND THE WORLD, THEY DEMONSTRATE THAT THEY ARE WELL-TRAINED, HIGHLY-MOTIVATED, AND READY TO DO WHATEVER OUR PRESIDENT ASKS OF THEM, WHENEVER THEY'RE CALLED, AND WHEREVER THEY'RE TOLD TO GO.

RECENTLY OUR CHIEF OF STAFF, GENERAL JUMPER, AND I TRAVELED THROUGHOUT SOUTHWEST ASIA TO VISIT OUR DEPLOYED AIRMEN; FROM BASE TO BASE, OUR AIRMEN CONTINUOUSLY IMPRESSED US WITH THEIR DEDICATION TO DUTY AND LOVE FOR OUR COUNTRY, DESPITE THE AUSTERE CONDITIONS THEY LIVE AND WORK

IN. WHY? BECAUSE THEY KNOW THEIR MISSION IS IMPORTANT, AND THEY DO IT DAY IN AND DAY OUT WITH THE UTMOST PROFESSIONALISM.

DESPITE THEIR DEVOTION TO DUTY, EACH ONE OF THESE AIRMEN WILL CROSS A THRESHOLD AT SOME POINT IN THEIR CAREER AND HAVE TO MAKE THE PAINSTAKING DECISION WHETHER TO CONTINUE TO SERVE IN OUR AIR FORCE, OR TO TRANSITION INTO A PRIVATE SECTOR JOB THAT DOES NOT REQUIRE THEM TO DEPLOY, LEAVE THEIR FAMILIES, AND POSSIBLY GIVE THEIR LIVES.

FOR MY FAMILY AND I, THAT DECISION CAME IN 1998. FOR OVER 25 YEARS NOW, MY WIFE SHERRY AND I HAVE RELOCATED OUR THREE CHILDREN THROUGH 9 PERMANENT CHANGES OF STATION, PLUS ACCUMULATED SEVERAL YEARS OF SEPARATION, DUE TO DEPLOYMENTS AND REMOTE ASSIGNMENTS.

JUST LIKE OUR AIRMEN TODAY, THIRTEEN YEARS AGO I ALSO SERVED IN SAUDI ARABIA FOR SEVEN MONTHS DURING THE GULF WAR. TWICE MORE I RETURNED TO THE ARABIAN DESERT ON EXTENDED DEPLOYMENTS, MISSING CHRISTMASES, BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES. IN 1998, AFTER RETURNING HOME FROM THE THIRD TRIP, SHERRY AND I BEGAN TO QUESTION IF THE DEMANDS AND SACRIFICES OF SERVICE AFFECTING OUR FAMILY WERE WORTH THE RETURN IN INVESTMENT. MORE SO, MANY OTHER AIRMEN WERE

DEBATING THE SAME, AND UNFORTUNATELY, THEY LEFT OUR SERVICE IN RECORD NUMBERS.

SHERRY AND I, TOO, THOUGHT LONG AND HARD ABOUT LEAVING THE AIR FORCE – THE SERVICE AND EXTENDED FAMILY WE'D COME TO LOVE SO MUCH. FORTUNATELY, WE RECOGNIZED THAT OUR MILITARY AND YOU, OUR CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS, WERE PAYING ATTENTION. WE BEGAN TO SEE SIGNS AND PLANS FOR POSITIVE CHANGES ON PAY AND COMPENSATION, QUALITY-OF LIFE-INITIATIVES, AND IN THE WAY THE AIR FORCE MANAGES DEPLOYMENTS. SHERRY AND I DECIDED WE WANTED TO BE A PART OF THESE CHANGES, SO WE STAYED....AND WE'RE SO THANKFUL THAT WE DID.

I CAN ASSURE YOU LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THAT MANY OF THE NEARLY 40,000 DEDICATED AIRMEN WHO ARE DEPLOYED AND POSTURED FOR WAR RIGHT NOW WILL RETURN HOME IN THE MONTHS AND YEARS TO COME WITH SOME OF THOSE SAME THOUGHTS AND CONCERNS. HOWEVER, UNLIKE MY THREE TRIPS TO THE DESERT, MANY OF THEM WILL RETURN FROM THEIR 6TH, 7TH, AND 8TH EXTENDED DEPLOYMENTS AWAY FROM HOME AND THEIR FAMILIES. 77 PERCENT OF THEM WILL MAKE A RE-ENLISTMENT DECISION IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS. THAT IS WHY IT'S CRITICAL WE CONTINUE TO PURSUE IMPROVEMENTS FOR THEM AND THEIR FAMILIES – MEANINGFUL IMPROVEMENTS TO MAKE CONTINUED SERVICE AN ATTRACTIVE ALTERNATIVE TO TAKING THEIR EXPERIENCE AND TALENT ELSEWHERE.

IF WE DON'T, THEIR REPLACEMENT WILL COME AT AN EVEN GREATER COST TO THE TAXPAYER.

AS THE CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT OF THE AIR FORCE, ONE OF MY MOST IMPORTANT ROLES IS TO TALK WITH OUR GREAT AIRMEN, LISTEN TO WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY, AND REPORT THEIR FEEDBACK TO OUR SENIOR LEADERSHIP, INCLUDING YOU, OUR ELECTED OFFICIALS. IN MY EIGHT SHORT MONTHS IN OFFICE, I'VE TRAVELED EXTENSIVELY, MEETING AND TALKING WITH OUR AIRMEN. THERE ARE CLEARLY CONCERNS AND ISSUES THAT SURFACE IN EVERY FORUM THAT I SPEAK, AND I WANT TO SHARE JUST A FEW OF THOSE WITH YOU NOW.

AS A SERVICE WE RECOGNIZE THAT PAY AND COMPENSATION ARE DIRECTLY TIED TO RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT. BUT WE ALSO REALIZE THOSE ARE NOT THE ONLY FACTORS OUR AIRMEN USE TO MAKE RE-ENLISTMENT DECISIONS. A CHIEF CONCERN OF OUR PEOPLE IS THE HIGH-OPERATIONS TEMPO THEY CONTINUALLY FACE.

CURRENTLY, THE UNIFORMED AIR FORCE IS THE SMALLEST WE'VE BEEN SINCE OUR INCEPTION IN 1947, YET WE ARE SUPPORTING MORE OPERATIONS AND FRONTS THAN ANYTIME IN HISTORY. THE AIR FORCE HAS WORKED HARD TO GIVE OUR PEOPLE A PREDICTABLE DEPLOYMENT PROCESS DESIGNED FOR A HIGH-OPERATIONS –TEMPO ENVIRONMENT. HOWEVER, POSTURING FOR WAR HAS FORCED US TO SURGE BEYOND NORMAL ROTATION AND DEPLOYMENT PERIODS. OUR AIR EXPEDITIONARY FORCE PROCESS CONTINUES TO WORK, BUT IT IS

NOW STRESSED BEYOND ITS DESIGNED CAPABILITY. WE RECENTLY SUSPENDED OUR PROGRAMMED ROTATION SCHEDULES AND ARE PREPARED TO DO ALL OUR PRESIDENT ASKS, NO MATTER HOW LONG IT TAKES; HOWEVER, WE ALSO LOOK FORWARD TO RETURNING TO NORMAL ROTATIONS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

WITH A FORCE SO SMALL AND COMMITMENTS SO BIG, HOW ARE WE ABLE TO SUSTAIN THE PACE OF OPERATIONS AND CONTINUE TO BE THE WORLD'S GREATEST AIR FORCE? ONE REASON.... ONLY BECAUSE WE HAVE THE WORLD'S FINEST AIR NATIONAL GUARD AND AIR FORCE RESERVE FORCES AS A CRITICAL PART OF OUR TEAM; WE COULDN'T DO IT WITHOUT THEM. THEY STAND SHOULDER-TO-SHOULDER WITH OUR ACTIVE FORCE AND PERFORM THE MISSION SEAMLESSLY. THE AIR NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ARE NATIONAL TREASURES THAT WE ARE NOW ASKING MORE OF THAN EVER BEFORE. FOR THESE CITIZEN AIRMEN, WE MUST ENSURE THEIR COMPENSATION IS EQUITABLE IN COMPARISON TO THE ACTIVE FORCE AND CONSISTENT WITH THE JOB WE ARE ASKING THEM TO DO.

YET ANOTHER CONCERN THAT I HEAR IN ALMOST EVERY FORUM IS THE INEQUITY IN EDUCATION BENEFITS THROUGHOUT OUR FORCE. CURRENTLY, THE AIR FORCE HAS 57,000 AIR FORCE MEMBERS WHO HAVE NO VETERANS' EDUCATION BENEFITS. SOME 45,000 OF THOSE DECLINED THE MONTGOMERY GI BILL AT A VERY YOUNG AGE, AND ANOTHER 12,000 DECLINED VEAP, THE VETERANS EDUCATION

ASSISTANCE PROGRAM OFFERED FROM 1977-1985. FOR MANY OF THESE PEOPLE, THE DECISION TO DECLINE WAS MADE AT THE AGE OF 17 OR 18, SOME WITH ADVICE FROM WELL-MEANING PEOPLE WHO DID NOT HAVE ALL THE FACTS. ULTIMATELY, THIS HAS BEEN A SOURCE OF FRUSTRATION FOR MANY YEARS AND CAN BE RESOLVED ONLY BY ALLOWING AN OPEN SEASON FOR ALL ACTIVE DUTY MEMBERS TO ENROLL IN THE MONTGOMERY GI BILL.

FINALLY, I WANT TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS MY PERSONAL GRATITUDE FOR THE SUPPORT YOU'VE GIVEN TO OUR MEN AND WOMEN IN UNIFORM. MANY OF YOU HAVE TRAVELED TO OUR BASES AND SEEN OUR AIRMEN IN ACTION. YOU KNOW, AS I DO, THAT AMERICA CAN BE PROUD OF ITS SONS AND DAUGHTERS WHO REPRESENT FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD.

THE TARGETED PAY RAISES, IMPROVED HOUSING, BETTER FACILITIES, AND OTHER QUALITY-OF-LIFE INITIATIVES YOU'VE GIVEN US ARE TANGIBLE MEASURES TO OUR AIRMEN, SOLDIERS, SAILORS, MARINES AND COASTGUARDSMEN, THAT THEY HAVE THE SUPPORT OF THIS DISTINGUISHED BODY AND THE SUPPORT OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. ON BEHALF OF AMERICA'S AIR FORCE, THANK YOU FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP AND FOR ALLOWING US THE OPPORTUNITY TO HIGHLIGHT OUR ISSUES AND CONCERNS IN THIS OPEN FORUM.